

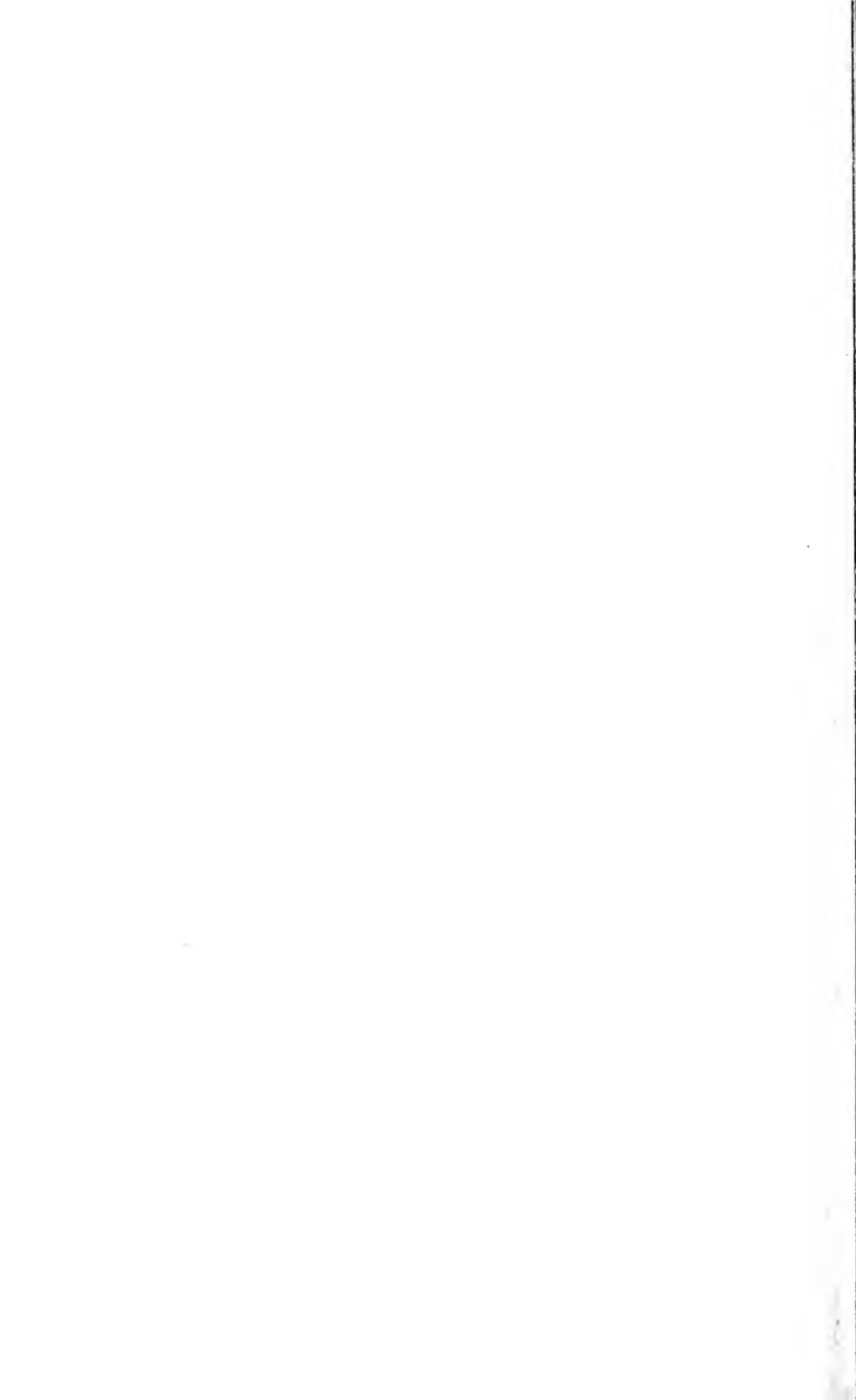
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# The First School House in Worcester

Here John Adams taught  
from 1755 - 1758



Published by  
Colonel Timothy Bigelow Chapter  
Daughters of the American Revolution



REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE  
ON HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
AND MARKING LOCAL  
SITES OF THE

**COLONEL TIMOTHY BIGELOW CHAPTER**

DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN  
REVOLUTION



WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS  
January 26, 1903

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Samuel and Stephen Salisbury

12 Apr. 1797

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For scores of years it has been a much-discussed question among local antiquarians, whether John Adams, Worcester's most illustrious school-master, during his service here, from 1755—1758, taught in the first rude building erected near Lincoln Square or in the second schoolhouse in the vicinity of Main and Mechanic streets. While the weight of argument from published sources has favored the former location, still many a mind has harbored doubts on the subject, or held tenaciously to the second school-house as the field of the young student's labors, as he here combined the roles of pedagogue and law-reader. To complicate decision there were certain vague, confusing statements in the two most widely-read volumes of local history,—Lincoln's History p. 252, and Caleb Wall's "Reminiscences." (p. 91 and 171.)

In view of the wish of the Colonel Timothy Bigelow Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, to place a memorial tablet upon the site of the school-house where this Revolutionary hero taught in Worcester, the Committee on Historical Research of the Chapter has made exhaustive efforts to settle, by facts and sequences, the disputed point of the location of his school-house. From all available warrants, records, diaries and other data, important facts and sidelights have been gathered and collated to form an argument as conclusive as possible. The history of the schools and school-houses, in every important town act, have been cited, from the real beginnings of free instruction to

1770. The effort has been to allow the records to make their own argument, with only a few necessary explanations. References are to the volumes and pages of the original Town Records at the City Hall. In their published form, edited by Mr. Franklin P. Rice, they have been of great value for reference but the omission of the warrants, in the main, in these published volumes, necessitated return to the original manuscripts. The first decisive act for the creation of a free school in Worcester was in 1726, April 4,-Vol. 1: pp. 39-40) "Voted that ye Selectmen forthwith take care & provide a sufficient Schoole for ye Education of Youth in ye Town of Worcester." Then followed the agreement with Jonas Rice "to teach such children and Youth as any of ye Inhabitants should send to him to read and write as ye Law directs.—And to keep such schoole untill ye fifteenth Day of December next ensuing to Date hearof, sd. Schoole to be suported at ye Town's Charge". The experiment seemed unsatisfactory, probably because of expense, and December 19 following, the record reads,-(Vol. 1: p. 47) "Voted that ye Town will not have a Schoole, it past on ye negitive",-a droll, paradoxical mode of recording many a negative vote. As a result of such action the town was "presented",-fined for violation of the state law requiring a free school in each town. In January, 1727, sums were voted as assessments "for and towards ye support of ye Schoole in sd. Town" and also to meet "charge of presentment for want of a school".

After this permanent establishment of a town school in 1727 there were yearly appropriations for the support of the schools, varying in amounts, mention of an occasional school-master by name, with record of his payment, or more often directions, that "he shall repair to the house of ——, there to keep school until" some prescribed date. In other words, there was no specific building; the school was "a moving school," a feature continued even after the first school-house was built, as will be noted later.

The first direct mention of a school-house was in the warrant and vote of October 7, 1729 (Vol. I: p. 67): "Voted, If the town will build a Schoole house it passed on the neggative." This seemed to delay further action for four years. Meanwhile, as the population increased in the outlying districts of the town, instruction must be provided for these several "Quarters or Skirts;" hence in April 13, 1731 (Vol. I: pp. 77-78) it was decreed that "a suitable number of dames, not exceeding five, was to be provided by ye Selectmen at ye charge of ye town for ye teaching of small children to read," etc.

Again, in 1733, the question of the school-house came again to the fore. In the warrant for a meeting, May 15, 1733 (Vol. I: p. 98) was an article "to See if ye Town will build a Schoole House;" and "at sd. meeting it was voted that there be a Schoolhouse Built at ye charge of ye Town and placed in ye Centre of ye South half of ye Town or as near as may be with conveniency having regard to suitable ground for such a house to stand on and Whear

Land may be purchased in case it falls in men's particular property, provided ye purchis may be on Reasonable Terms" (p. 101). Then follow the votes of dimensions of this first schoolhouse whose erection was yet delayed many years. It was to be 24 feet long, 16 feet wide and 7 feet "studd," to be compleatly furnished with a good Chimney, Glass." etc. As additional action to further the matter. "Collo. John Chandler was appointed Surveyor to find the Centre of the south half of the Town."

The next significant record is two years later,—in the warrant for May, 1735 (Vol. I: p. 126)—"To see if ye town Reconsider a Vote formerly passed for Building a Schoole house in ye Centre of ye South half of ye town and in lieu thearof Build one whear ye Centre Line may strike the Countrey Road or as near there as ye Land will alow of for a Convenientent Spot as may be Reasonably purchased for that End and to grant money for erecting the same." At the meeting thus called, (pp. 103-4) "John Chandler Jun. Esqr. Surveyor and ye Comitte appointed to find whear a Centre Line will strike the Countrey Road in order to Build a school-house thear or as near as may be in some Suitable place made Report and thereupon ye Town come into ye following Vote, vizt:

"Voted that ye Committee or those that still Live in the Town formery apointed to build a school house do as soon as may be. erect and finish a Schoolhouse of Dimensions formerly voted. at or near the northwest corner of ye Land of John Chandler, Jun. Esqr. whear he now dwells and as his

fence now stands and that ye charge thereof be payed out of the overplus money now Lying in ye hands of ye Town Treasurer as appears by ye Settlement of ye Treasurer's Last accompts and ye Selectmen are directed to give order accordingly."

The tone of the above vote would indicate that there was some impatience at the delay in providing any schoolhouse, but action in those days was never precipitate. Moreover, mention is made of some necessary corrections in the surveys that had been made. Again, two years passed, then in the warrant calling a meeting for June 21, 1738, was a definite and conclusive article (Vol. I: pp. 104-5): "Whereas application has been made to ye Selectmen of sd. Town setting forth that they apprehend ye place which ye Town pitched upon by their Last Vote to set ye schoolhouse on is very inconvenient and that more proper place may be found between the courthouse and ye bridge below ye fulling-mills." At the meeting thus called, with Palmer Golding as Moderator (p. 165) it was "Voted that ye Town Reconsider their Vote last passed for seting ye Schoolhouse and order by their vote that ye schoolhouse be built or set up between ye courthouse and the bridge below ye fulling-mills either above or below the Road." The erection of the building must have been begun at once, after this action, for in the "Records of the Proprietors," is a reference in November, 1738, to a tract of land owned by William Jennison, purchasable near whear the schoolhouse is now building. Moreover, in

appropriating money for the support of the schools the next year, 1739, a portion was to be used "for keeping a Grammar School in ye present schoolhouse" (Vol. II: p. 8).

During the next decade the votes relating to the schools are not of great moment and there is no mention of any new building. In 1748 there were suggestions for district schoolhouses (Vol. II: p. 146), but no action thereon of positive nature. The references during these years and later to the leasing and selling of "school lands" has no bearing upon the location of the schoolhouses,—such portions, called "ministerial and schoole lands" had been early distributed in the history of the settlement and their rental or sale contributed to the support of the minister and schools.

In 1752 there were two significant articles in the warrant for the March meeting (Vol. II: pp. 179-180), "To see if ye Town will give order to some person or persons to Repair Chimney in ye Schoolhouse in ye Centre of ye Town" and "To see if ye Town will build ye Schoolhouses in ye Quarters of ye Town and if they shall agree to Build them to chuse some suitable Persons to see same effected and likewise to see if ye Town will grant a suitable & Sufficient Sum for ye building of ye schoolhouses aforesaid." The sequel follows,—a double negative action,—"After considerable debate on ye Second and third artices in ye warrant for Repairing the old schoolhouse and building new ones, ye Question was put whether ye town would grant a

sum for Services 'or ether of them  
and it passed in ye negative."

While no vote for new or improved schoolhouses was decreed this year, 1752, an important measure was passed, doubtless to meet the exactions of the law relative to grammar schools and extended periods of teaching. The vote follows, "that the Inhabitants of the Centre extending one mile and a half around ye Schoolhouse should have allowed them their proportion of money for the support of teaching, provided they do, bona fide, keep a grammar school the whole year; and if their proportion of money will procure a master more than 12 weeks, the usual time they have of late had schooling, then any person may have liberty to send children afterwards." This vote, with no reference to any schoolhouse, excused the inhabitants of the immediate centre of the town from contributing to the general support of the district schools, provided they would maintain a grammar school,—not a "moving school,"—in the Centre of the Town for the entire year. Such, of course, would be kept in the only building yet erected, near our present Lincoln Square. The vote relating to the maintenance of a grammar school, above cited, is followed in Lincoln's History of Worcester (p. 252) by an indefinite statement which has caused much query and misinterpretation, "About this period a schoolhouse with two rooms was erected by James Putnam, John Chandler and other public-spirited individuals," etc. All evidence, here given, would indicate that such a building was not erected until after

1763,—quite remote from “about this period,” 1752.

In 1753 and 1754 there were no votes relating to schoolhouses. The sum appropriated for support of the schools was increased from £60 to £75, in 1755. The master engaged for that year was John Adams, by his own statement the Town schoolmaster, not teacher in any private house or school, had such existed at the time. He was master of the grammar school, kept in the only building used as a school in the centre of the town. Possibly at the town meeting, 1755, three pages of whose records have been lost, action was taken to repair the chimney in this old schoolhouse, though three years before a negative action had been recorded. In 1756 (Vol. III: p. 36) is a record, “To John Chandler Jun. for makeing stone) — (possibly deciphered “new”),—“chimney in the schoolhouse and finding all the materials and paying ye workmen, one pound, two shillings and five pence.” By good fortune, one may read, at this same time, in John Adams’ diary, an entry to the effect “All this past week my designs have been interrupted by the Troubles & Confusion of ye House. I shall be able to resume the Thread of my studies I hope now” (Original Diary, Vol. I: p. 24).

Again, in this same diary, under date of February 13, 1756, is a note of marked interest and importance in our search,—“Supped at Major Gardiner’s and engaged to keep school at Bristol, provided Worcester people at their ensuing March meeting should change this into a moving school, not other-

wise." Here is proof that John Adams was the town schoolmaster and that discussion was rife as to the advisability of continuing the increased appropriation for a grammar school the entire year. At the March meeting however, there was an allowance of the usual sum and John Adams remained in Worcester, combining his teaching with law-studies at Judge Putnam's office.

The crucial point in discussion during the years of 1756-7 was the desirability of erecting a new schoolhouse in the centre of the town. To this question the warrant and vote, here given, furnish conclusive evidence that the matter was definitely settled and that no new building was erected during these years of John Adams' teaching. A special town meeting was called to act upon this matter October 17, 1757. The warrant reads in part: "To vote a sum of money sufficient to build a School House in ye middle of the Town and to build and pay for those already Built in the several quarters of ye Town and the money so granted to be assessed upon all the Inhabitants of sd. Town and when paid those of the Inhabitants Living within one mile and an half of the School House in the Middle of the Town and that have usually paid towards Supporting such Schools in sd. Quarters to have there own money for ye Building sd. SchoolHouse, and the several Quarters that have paid towards Supporting such Schools in sd. Quarters to have there own money and in the same proportion as they have had money for the Supporting sd. Schools in sd. Quarters, and to

appoint a Committee for Building sd. Schoolhouse and any other thing that may be necessary in Building and Compleating sd. Houses," etc. This exhaustive, involved warrant, whose meaning is apparent after careful reading, occupies far more space upon the record page than was required to report the action. Here is the record, crowded into a minimum space in the original page (Vol. III, p. 59): The Question being put if the Town would act on the Subject Matter contained in the warrant for calling this meeting & it passed in the negative."

In May, 1759, the year after John Adams had finished teaching in Worcester, the question was raised as to the advisability of further economy in school appropriation. To aid in the economies necessary to build a new meeting-house, a project already strongly urged, in May, 1759, "The Town took under consideration the votes passed in March Last relateing to the schools and the grant to support them" (seventy-five pounds) and "thereupon voted to Reconsider sd. Votes,—also Voted that the School be a moving school the Present year & to be kept in the same way & manner that the school used to be kept in before March 1752 & that the sum of forty-three pounds be granted for the support of the schools the present year & that the Parts of the Town commonly called Smiths' and Parkers' Rows have the sums allowed to them as usual to be Laid out in Schooling as they used to have before March, 1752." This retrograde movement continued for two years, discussion arising at each meeting upon the appropriation of forty-

three or seventy-five pounds, with decision for the smaller sum. In 1763 came the climax; apparently the liberal element in the town would no longer submit to the inadequate appropriations and accommodations. In the warrant calling a meeting for March 4, 1763, is an article—"To see if the Town will give Liberty to James Putnam, Esq. & others to set up a schoolhouse on some Part of ye Common That may be convenient for That Purpose and Appoint a Committe to Give a Deed of Such Land as may be necessary for ye Use of sd. House, They Paying What it is Worth." The permission was granted—(Vol. III, pp. 125-6): "Voted that James Putnam & others have Liberty to set up a SchoolHouse on such part of the Town's Land as the Selectmen Shall Think Proper."

This second schoolhouse in the centre of the town of Worcester, built by private individuals, was finished in 1765, seven years after John Adams had left Worcester. In the warrant for the March meeting, 1765 (Vol. III, p. 164), is an article—"The Town having by a Vote given Liberty to Gardiner Chandler & others to Build a School-House on ye Town Land & they having Built ye Same on the Northwest corner of the School Land, for ye Town to vote their approbation thereof." Thus is located the second building, erected between 1763-1765, near the union of Mechanic and Elm streets with Main.

One further record is of import—the vote at the March meeting, 1769 (Vol. III, p. 231)—"Voted that William Young, etc. be a Committe to treat with ye Proprietors of ye Grammar School

in Town & to agree with them upon what terms they will allow said School to be considered as the Town's Grammar School for ye Benefit of such Persons in Town as Shall Incline to send their children there & also to consult some Plan for Keeping English Schools in sd. Town." The committee thus appointed reported their agreement, ratified by the town, and six pounds of the seventy-six appropriated for schools was "granted to ye Proprietors of ye Grammar School ye currant year, said Proprietors haveing engag'd that said Gramer School shall be free for Learning ye Languages & children be admitted by said Proprietors to have ye same Privileges & upon ye same terms in said School as ye Children of said Proprietors."

The above records seem to establish the fact that John Adams taught in the first schoolhouse, commonly known as the Lincoln Square schoolhouse. Through the kindness and research of Mr. Daniel Kent, the approximate location of this first building, the site of the school where John Adams taught, has been effected. The deeds and their sequential argument follow:

It is a difficult undertaking to ascertain today the exact location, in the center of a large city, of a school house (16x24) built in 1738 when the bounds and descriptions, if given at all, were usually very indefinite. Fortunately, however, the Land Records preserve many important facts and enable us to reproduce the old divisions of land and location of many of the early buildings.

On February 1, 1731-2 William Jenison, an owner of large tracts of land in Worcester, deeded to Jonathan Houghton, Treasurer of Worcester County, for the consideration of "my Goodwill and Regard which I have for & bear towards ye said County of Worcester and for Accommodating them with a Suitable and Convenient place for building a Court house upon, &c," a certain piece of land on the west side of Main street 1½ rods wide at the southern end and 4 rods at the northern and about 18 rods in length. The location of this lot began nearly in front of the Second Parish Church, extending north to a point a little beyond the center of the present Court House and included the land now occupied by the street and terrace in front of said Court House.

On November 27, 1738 the same William Jenison conveyed to the Town of Worcester "for ye Conveniency of setting a scholl House" a piece of land "where ye present Scholl House is now building near ye Court House" and bounded "southerly on ye County land easterly on ye County road westerly on my own land as ye fence now stands northerly on my own land & to Extend twenty feet Northerly from said Schol House & said Northerly bounds to be parrallell with ye North side said school House." This deed was made 164 years ago and would seem to contain information of but little value in locating the exact position of the school house. It does, however, contain one item of great importance, which is that the north end of the school house was twenty feet south of the north line

of the school lot and parallel with it. This remained the property of the Town of Worcester until March 30, 1801 when in accordance with a vote of the Town it was sold to Samuel Chandler and by him on the same day conveyed to the County of Worcester.

The key to the situation now depends on locating the north line of the school lot. This is found in a deed given by Luke Brown, Jr., to Samuel and Stephen Salisbury, April 12, 1797. The description begins on what is now Salisbury street about 15 rods north of Highland street and thence runs southerly on the "County road leading to Holden to the corner of Abraham Lincoln's store by the County or post road" (now Main street). Then after bounding on the north and west sides of the store lot it bounds "West twenty degrees North twenty three rods. This last line bounds southwardly partly on land said to be purchased by the Town of Worcester for a school house and partly on land of Isaiah Thomas." This is the only deed on record which describes this course and from which it would be possible to locate the north line of the school house lot; the only reference in the records from which we can determine the exact location of the school house north and south.

Where was this line? On January 27, 1797 Robert M. Peck sold to Isaiah Thomas a piece of land which bounded twenty rods northerly on Luke Brown, Jr.'s. land. This is the Thomas land mentioned in the Brown-Salisbury deed and bounded easterly on the school house lot.

On April 6, 1801 Isaiah Thomas sold

to the County of Worcester the land on which was built the old brick Court house. The northeast corner of the lot was "about twenty-four feet northerly of where the underpinning stones are to be placed for the new Court house" and one foot east of the southeast corner of a dwelling house. This lot was bounded east on County land.

On the 24th. of November 1807 Isaiah Thomas sold to Clark Whittemore a parcel of land, adjoining the land he conveyed to the county, the south line of which was 24 feet north of and parallel to the north side of the brick Court House and at the southeast corner distant 32 feet south from the Salisbury land which we have seen was the north line of the school house lot. This lot Mr. Whittemore sold March 2, 1833 to Stephen Salisbury and on March 10, 1851 Mr. Salisbury conveyed this lot, with other land situated north of it bounding on Highland street, to the American Antiquarian Society on which land the present Antiquarian Hall was erected. The southeast corner of the lot is marked by a large stone post by the sidewalk, this post being 32 feet south of the north line of the school house lot. Thus we have located the northerly line of the school house lot.

The north side of the school house, according to Jenison's deed, it will be remembered, was 20 feet south of the north line of the lot and parallel with it. The north side of the school house, therefore, was located on a line running east from a point 12 feet north of the stone post at the southeast corner of the Antiquarian Society's land and, as

the school house was 16x24, it must have extended either four or 12 feet in front of the present Court House property, this depending on how the building stood.

The northeasterly corner of the land sold by Peck to Thomas was not quite five rods from the County road. The northerly end of the Court House property, as deeded by Jenison, was 4 rods wide and bounded easterly on the County road, so that the school house must have stood somewhere directly in front of the stone post and between it and Main Street.

It has generally been an accepted tradition that the first school house stood level with Main street, with a high bank back of it. The records at the Registry of Deeds do not support this tradition. On December 3, 1773, in a deed from Luke Brown, Sr.'s administrator to William Paine, physician, of Worcester, Levi Shepard, apothecary, and Ebenezer Hunt, physician, both of Northampton, conveying the land on which they had built an apothecary shop, it says, "with the Priviledges of Passing around said Shop & for Repairing the Same from time to Time as Need may Require & for Secureing the Banks on the Southerly, Westerly & Northerly Parts of said Shop from Caving in Upon it."

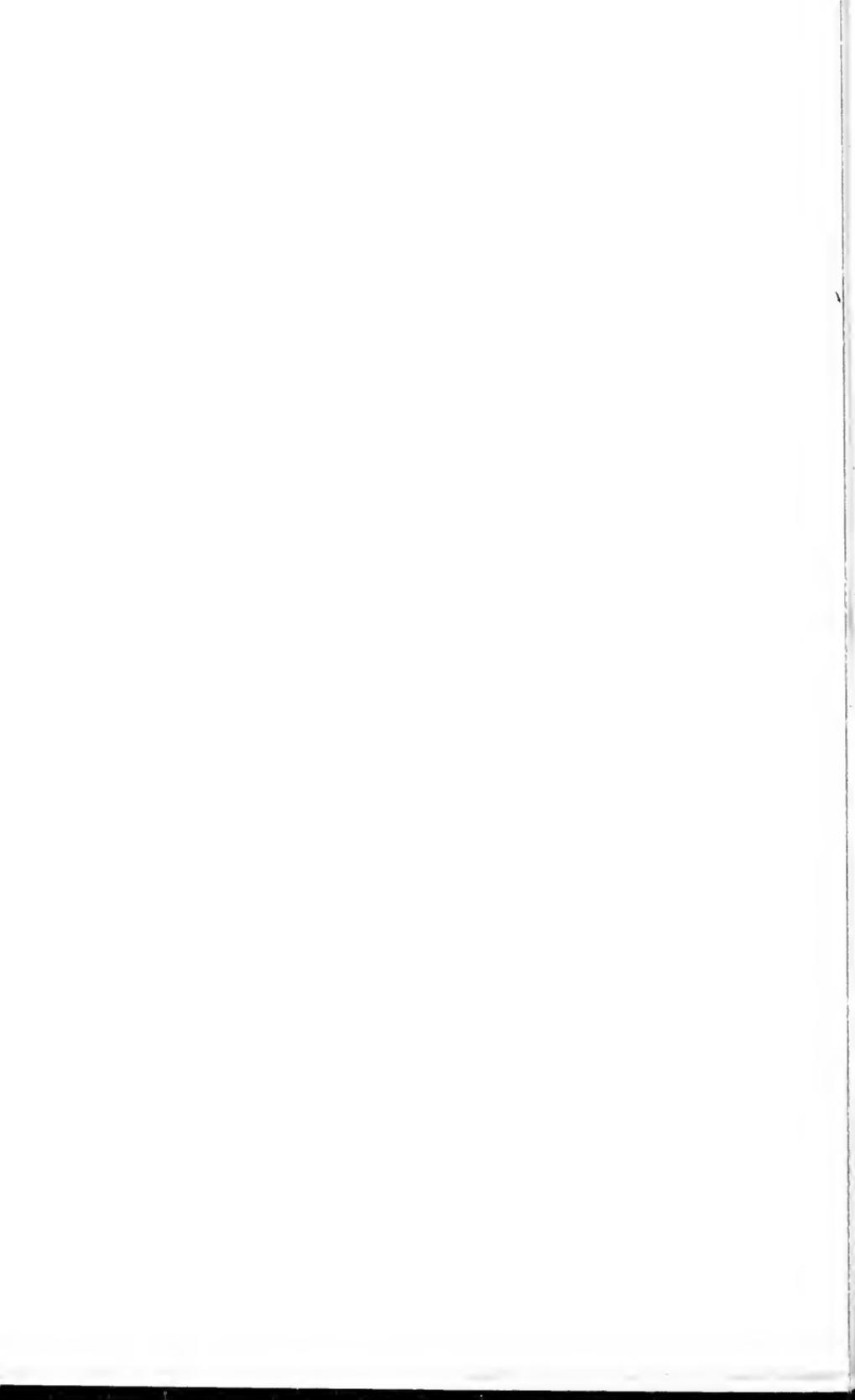
It will be remembered that the deed from Brown, Junior, to the Salisburys bounded on this store, at that time owned by Abraham Lincoln, and that the north line of the schoolhouse lot started at the southwest corner of the store. If there was a bank sufficiently high on the south side of the store to

require a reservation on account of its liability to cave in, it would hardly seem probable that the school house situated 20 feet south of this bank could have been on a level with the street. It must have been situated on the top of the bank, and probably its exact location was on land now used for the street in front of the present Court House. This street was laid out as a public highway "from the east front of the Court House to the Holden Road" March 8, 1816.

We have, therefore, established the fact that the first school house in Worcester stood directly in front of the stone post at the southeast corner of the Antiquarian lot.

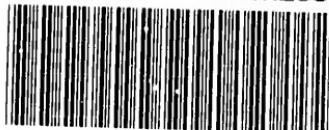
(Signed)

ANNIE RUSSELL MARBLE,  
HARRIETTE M. FORBES,  
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MARY JILLSON PARKER,  
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